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Building Toward a Shared Culture Focused on Student Learning

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Academic Chairperson's Conference presentation proposal 2016

- 1) Andi Lassiter
- 2)
- 3) Building Toward a Shared Culture Focused on Student Learning
- 4) Abstract: Revising or establishing student learning goals for a department can be a key point for driving change in curriculum, program structure, and faculty development. This session describes one department's efforts toward culture change with student learning goals that feed higher level institutional objectives, comprehensive program assessment, and accreditation.
- 5) Keywords: Assessment, Program Outcomes, Learning Goals, Culture change
- 6) Presentation topic themes: Evaluation and assessment
- 7) Target audience: all department chairs
- 8) Type of presentation: Best Practice Presentation
- 9) Objectives:
 - Reflect on the role of student learning toward culture-building and toward evaluating departmental and institutional goals
 - Discuss ways that faculty development and departmental planning can benefit from a more intentional focus on learning goals
 - Develop strategies for academic departments/units to align varied aspects of their culture with shared student learning objectives

10) Description (300-500 words)

The Higher Learning Commission and other accrediting bodies are increasingly focused on assessment efforts that document student learning. Following our last departmental program review and our institution's last accreditation review, our department was faced with the need to establish specific learning goals and to develop assessment efforts to evaluate our progress toward student accomplishment of those learning goals. These needed to align with college and institutional-wide goals. The assessment planning and measurement processes that followed will be described briefly in this best practice presentation. In addition, this session will present some of the strategies that have worked for us as we've renewed our focus on student learning. It will also provide some points of discussion for participants to share what has worked for them to make subtle changes to department culture, while being respectful of shared governance.

For quite some time most faculty in our department were assessing student learning, usually at the course level, but as a department we needed to become much more intentional with our documentation within and across programs. Assessment was seen by some as just a reporting process rather than as a method that could illustrate our successes. Revitalizing our focus on student learning has not always been a smooth process, but it can help faculty connect departmental and program assessment to their courses and across programs.

Early on in this process our department established common student learning outcomes. A comprehensive assessment plan was developed and programs are now reporting annually on their

progress toward those plans. Standing agenda items in department meetings and open sharing of new ideas can help to keep up the energy around our learning goals. We are working past the crisis mentality of “another report” and shifting our focus toward improvement of students and where we want them to be at graduation and beyond.

This proposed session will highlight some of the processes our department has used to re-energize our assessment of student learning efforts, toward more effective collaboration and more intentional communication about what we do. Participants in the session will also discuss strategies that chairs can use to help build a shared purpose for departments and to help shift the culture. Through efforts we have used, our culture seems to be shifting (albeit, slowly) around our student learning assessment goals.

The topic of departmental culture is very relevant to all chairpersons, and the audience participation in targeted discussion points connecting student learning and departmental culture should generate valuable discussions.